The Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art Presents Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe

News Release
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Landmark exhibition features magnificent paintings of festive celebrations and newsworthy events from eighteenth-century Europe

Cleveland, OH (February 6, 2018) – ***Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe*** showcases outstanding masterworks by revered artists who recorded some of the most newsworthy events and impressive spectacles of eighteenth-century Europe. Whether depicting a triumphal procession, a joyous celebration, or the catastrophic eruption of a volcano, the vibrant, colorful, and often monumental paintings in *Eyewitness Views* re-create what it was like to witness these magnificent occasions. Featuring nearly 40 richly detailed master paintings that utilize the impressive monuments of Venice, Rome, Paris, Warsaw, and other European cities as a backdrop, *Eyewitness Views* is the first exhibition to exclusively examine view paintings—faithful depictions of a given locale—as representations of contemporary (eighteenth-century) historical events. While costumes and customs illustrated in the paintings may differ from those of today, the feelings of anticipation and excitement generated by witnessing a momentous event will resonate with every visitor to this beautiful and historic "time capsule" exhibition. ***Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe*** is co-organized by the Cleveland Museum of Art, the J. Paul Getty Museum, and the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and is on view in the Kelvin and Eleanor Smith Foundation Exhibition Hall from February 25 through May 20, 2018.

"*Eyewitness Views* provides our visitors with a wonderful opportunity to experience history as it was being made," said William Griswold, director of the Cleveland Museum of Art. "The large-scale, vibrantly detailed paintings in the show will transport viewers to eighteenth-century Europe, immersing them in the most elaborate celebrations, festivals and historical events of the time."

Regularly commissioned by rulers, princes, ambassadors, and religious dignitaries to commemorate key moments in their personal and professional lives, master view painters such as such as Bernardo Bellotto, Canaletto, Francesco Guardi, and Giovanni Paolo Panini recorded events ranging from the

spectacular pageantry of a Venetian regatta to the solemn ritual of a religious procession. In the process, they produced some of their most significant and beautifully detailed works. Dramatically staged for the enjoyment of a wide range of spectators, and typically involving sumptuous costumes and elaborate temporary decorations, the events depicted give the viewer insight into the rituals and rare occurrences of a bygone era. Other paintings document some of the era's most horrific natural and man-made disasters: fires and volcanic eruptions provided particularly compelling imagery.

"The level of detail in these paintings can be astounding. To please their patrons—who had often paid for both the celebration depicted as well as the painting of the event—artists like Panini and Canaletto precisely documented the most minute elements of personality, costume and décor. Other artists excelled at conveying all the energy and atmosphere of an important festival or ceremony. Sometimes artists were confronted with the challenge of painting an event that they did not personally attend. This exhibition helps viewers understand the various ways artists addressed such challenges," said Marjorie E. Wieseman, the Paul J. and Edith Ingalls Vignos Jr. curator of European paintings and sculpture, 1500–1800, and chair of European art from classical antiquity to 1800.

Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe is separated into four thematic sections that investigate different aspects of this intriguing genre of painting.

Memory and Manipulation explores whether view painters were faithful chroniclers, capturing events exactly as witnessed, or whether they manipulated reality to meet aesthetic requirements and the expectations of their status-conscious clientele (and if so, how?).

Civic and Religious Ritual examines an array of historic events that took place in Europe during the period, including religious feast days and public rituals. Whether sacred or secular, these occasions constituted impressive demonstrations of civic pride.

Festival and Spectacle showcases the pageantry and entertainment in Venice and Rome in the 1700s, including ceremonial regatta performed for visiting dignitaries, and elaborately staged celebrations of royal births and marriages.

Disaster and Destruction presents scenes of devastation caused by fire, natural disaster, and political turmoil. These paintings downplay the presence of rulers and nobility to emphasize the plight of the broader population, and to encourage the viewer to identify more strongly with the horrors depicted.

Highlights in *Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe*

The Bucintoro at the Molo on Ascension Day, about 1745. Canaletto (Giovanni Antonio Canal) (Italian, 1697–1768). Oil on canvas; 115 × 163 cm. Philadelphia Museum of Art, the William L. Elkins Collection, 1924, E1924-3-48. Image: © The Philadelphia Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY

On the morning of Ascension Day, the doge (ruler of Venice) and senior government officials walked in procession to the Molo (a broad stone quay), where they boarded a gilded state barge known as the Bucintoro. Shaded by a parasol, the doge emerges from between the temporary market stalls set up for the Ascension Day fair. The Bucintoro depicted here, completed in 1729, was described by one visitor as “without doubt the finest ship in the world.” A curious detail enables us to date Canaletto’s painting precisely: on April 23, 1745, the Campanile in Piazza San Marco was struck by lightning, leaving it with a jagged edge until a scaffold for repairs could be erected after the fair.

View of the Rialto Bridge and the Palazzo dei Camerlenghi with the festive entry of the Patriarch Antonio Correr in 1737, 1735. Michele Marieschi (Italian, 1696–1743). Oil on canvas; 163.3 × 252.5 × 13.4 cm. Osterley Park, the Palmer-Morewood Collection, National Trust (accepted in lieu of tax and transferred to the National Trust by Her Majesty's Government in 1984), 771297. Photo: National Trust Photo Library / Art Resource, NY

When a new patriarch of Venice was appointed, he made his official entry into the city via the Grand Canal, arriving at the Rialto Bridge. In the foreground are the opulent state barges used to transport the patriarch; at right are gilded parade gondolas belonging to various ambassadors to Venice. The first bears a double-headed eagle, emblem of the Holy Roman Emperor, on the cabin roof. In order to show more of the Grand Canal, Marieschi deliberately manipulated the site's topography: he fused views in two different directions into a composition that suggests the waterway makes a 180-degree turn.

The Nocturnal Good Friday Procession in Piazza San Marco, about 1755. Francesco Guardi (Italian, 1712–1793). Oil on canvas; 48 × 84.5 cm. The Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, Presented by Mrs. W. F. R. Weldon, 1927, WA1927.1. Image: Ashmolean Museum, University of Oxford, UK / Bridgeman Images

This rare view of a nocturnal event shows Guardi applying his virtuoso talent to the artistic challenge of depicting illuminated darkness. Unique to Venice, the Good Friday procession of the Blessed Sacrament took place in Piazza San Marco, which was lit entirely with wax candles for the occasion. The golden mosaics on the basilica's facade glisten at the far end of the square. This immensely costly spectacle dazzled contemporary spectators. One remarked, "Nothing in the world is as beautiful as Venice during this night. Lit by a million torches . . . the entire city seems to be ablaze."

The Giovedì Grasso Festival in the Piazzetta, about 1775. Francesco Guardi (Italian, 1712–1793). Oil on canvas; 66.5 × 100 cm. Paris, Musée du Louvre, Departement des Peintures, 321. © RMN–Grand Palais / Art Resource, NY

Giovedì Grasso, the last Thursday before Lent, was a major festival in Venice. Spectators—some seated on temporary grandstands—crowd the Piazzetta to witness the carnival celebrations. Presiding over the festivities is the doge, a tiny white-caped figure on the loggia of the Doges' Palace. On the stage of an elaborate ephemeral pavilion, a team of acrobats form a human pyramid. Two long ropes leading to the upper right hint at a breathtaking performance to come: an acrobat will ascend to the top of the Campanile along one rope, then descend along the other, before arriving on the loggia of the Doge's Palace to offer flowers to the doge.

The Interior of Saint Peter's during the Visit of the Duc de Choiseul, 1756–57. Giovanni Paolo Panini (Italian, 1691–1765). Oil on canvas; 164.3 × 223.5 cm. The Collection of the Boston Athenaeum, Purchase 1834 (UR12)

From an elevated viewpoint near the entrance, we look down the nave of Saint Peter's in Rome toward the high altar and the magnificent bronze baldachin (ceremonial canopy) created by Gianlorenzo Bernini. While architectural splendor is the painting's main protagonist, this work was commissioned to commemorate a specific event: on April 5, 1756, Étienne François, comte de Choiseul-Stainville (later duc de Choiseul), paid an official visit to the basilica as part of his accreditation as French ambassador to the Holy See. Illuminated by a shaft of light, Choiseul (wearing a gold-embroidered waistcoat) and his entourage are seen at center right, preceded by a cardinal in red robes.

Tickets

Adults $12; seniors and college students $10; children 6–17 and member guests $6; 5 and under and CMA members free.

Member Preview Days

Friday, February 23, 11 a.m.–9 p.m.

Saturday, February 24, 10 a.m.–5 p.m.

Exhibition Catalogue

Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe is accompanied by a fully illustrated catalogue published by Getty Publications and authored by Peter Björn Kerber, assistant curator of paintings at the Getty Museum. Lavishly illustrated and meticulously researched, this volume provides the first-ever comprehensive study of this type of view painting. In examining these paintings alongside the historical events depicted in them, Peter Björn Kerber carefully reconstructs the meaning and context these paintings possessed for the artists who produced them and the patrons who commissioned them, as well as for their contemporary viewers.

Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe can be purchased for $45 at the Cleveland Museum of Art store.

Programming

Exhibition Tours
Tuesday and Thursday, 11 a.m., Saturday and Sunday, 2 p.m.
March 13 through May 6. Exhibition ticket required. Tours depart from the information desk.

Curator Talks with Betsy Wieseman
Fact or fiction? Aristocrats commissioned view painters to commemorate spectacular events staged at their command or for their benefit. Artists often gave the impression that they were faithful chroniclers, capturing an event on canvas just as they had witnessed it. Curator Betsy Wieseman talks about the ways artists often manipulated or "improved" upon reality in order to meet the expectations of their status-conscious clientele.

- Wednesday, February 28, 6:00 p.m.
- Tuesday, March 27, Noon
- Tuesday, April 10, Noon
- Tuesday, May 15, Noon

Classical Café Series
Tuesdays in March, 1:00–2:00 p.m.
Join us in the atrium for a series of live performances of 18th-century classical music.

- March 6
- March 13
- March 20
- March 27

Landscape Painting Workshops
Friday, March 16, 6:00–8:30 p.m. (with cocktails)
Sunday, April 22, 1:00–3:30 p.m.
Sunday, May 20, 1:00–3:30 p.m.

Let the paintings in *Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe* inspire your own landscape painting. After a visit to the exhibition, learn about basic color mixing, composition, and acrylic painting techniques. Feel free to bring a photo of a favorite landscape or work from the exhibition, or your imagination! Beginners are welcome. $20, CMA members $18. (Each person will make an acrylic painting on an 11-x-14-inch canvas.)

MIX: Spectacle
Friday, May 4, 6:00–10:00 p.m.
In the 1700s, Venice was renowned for staging the most lavish and extravagant celebrations in all of Europe. There were no cameras, so rulers and aristocrats commissioned magnificent paintings as a way of proclaiming their status and documenting significant milestones in their life. Some of these paintings are displayed in Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe. We'll party like it's 1799 with live music from Cleveland's own Mourning a Blkstar (in collaboration with choreographer Amy Notley and wearable art by Ron Shelton), creating our own spectacle.

Sunday, May 6, 11:00 a.m.– 4:00 p.m.
Play Day at CMA: Eyewitness Views
Celebrate the special exhibition ***Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe*** through play, art making, stories, music, and movement, plus free tickets to the exhibition! Bring your family, friends, or come on your own; expect activities for all ages! Visit ClevelandArt.org for details.

Performance

Wednesday, March 7, 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday, May 2, 6:00 p.m.
Chamber Music in the Galleries
Free; no tickets required

Baroque chamber ensembles from Case Western Reserve University under the direction of Julie Andrijeski perform two programs in conjunction with the exhibition ***Eyewitness Views: Making History in Eighteenth-Century Europe*** as part of the museum's ongoing Chamber Music in the Galleries series. The March 7 concert will also feature special guest Maria Cleary, a period harp specialist.

This exhibition has been co-organized by the J. Paul Getty Museum, the Minneapolis Institute of Art, and the Cleveland Museum of Art. It is supported by an indemnity from the Federal Council on the Arts and the Humanities.

Presenting Sponsor: Sam J. Frankino Foundation
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The Cleveland Museum of Art is supported in part by Cuyahoga County residents through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture. The Ohio Arts Council helped fund this exhibition with state tax dollars to encourage economic growth, educational excellence, and cultural enrichment for all Ohioans.

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About the Cleveland Museum of Art

The Cleveland Museum of Art is renowned for the quality and breadth of its collection, which includes more than 63,000 artworks and spans 6,000 years of achievement in the arts. The museum is a significant international forum for exhibitions, scholarship and performing arts and is a leader in digital innovations. One of the top comprehensive art museums in the nation, recognized for its award-winning Open Access program and free of charge to all, the Cleveland Museum of Art is located in the University Circle neighborhood.

The museum is supported in part by residents of Cuyahoga County through a public grant from Cuyahoga Arts & Culture and made possible in part by the Ohio Arts Council (OAC), which receives support from the State of Ohio and the National Endowment for the Arts. The OAC is a state agency that funds and supports quality arts experiences to strengthen Ohio communities culturally, educationally and economically. For more information about the museum and its holdings, programs and events, call 888-CMA-0033 or visit cma.org [1].

Magazine Article: Eyewitness Views [2]

Press Kit for Eyewitness Views [3]

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Links

[1] https://www.clevelandart.org

[2] https://www.clevelandart.org/magazine/cleveland-art-marchapril-2018/eyewitness-views

[3] https://www.dropbox.com/sh/7vw0fpz0ll9vjb2/AAAyRXZgT8Z2BtP9UZNtgD7Ia?dl=0

[4] https://www.clevelandart.org/about/press/media-kit